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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT INCREASES ACCESS TO BARIATRIC SURGERY

Humber River Regional Hospital to Provide 225 Surgeries in Ontario to Treat Severe Obesity

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is improving access to bariatric surgery for 225 Ontarians each year who are fighting severe obesity with new funding to the Humber River Regional Hospital, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

"Our government is committed to helping Ontarians lead healthy, active lives," said Smitherman. "For some patients who have already been fighting severe weight problems through diet and exercise, bariatric surgery is a medical treatment of last resort. This investment will provide those patients with the surgery they need in Ontario and will make Humber River Regional Hospital (HRRH) the province's first centre of excellence in providing bariatric surgery."

The funding announced today will enable the hospital to increase access to bariatric surgery, including specialized gastric bypass surgery, so individuals do not have to seek out-of-province care. Today's announcement includes:

- $3.7 million in base funding in 2006/07 to increase the hospital's surgical capacity to perform additional surgeries. This is in addition to the 48 surgical cases already performed at HRRH.
- $124,300 in capital funding for renovations to expand the bariatric surgical suite.

"We are excited by the government's investment that will make us the first centre of excellence in the province," said Dr. Rueben Devlin, President & CEO of Humber River Regional Hospital. "We have an outstanding laproscopic bariatric program staffed by some of the best in Ontario and we look forward to helping more Ontarians receive this highly specialized surgery closer to home."

Humber River Regional Hospital's bariatric surgery program has been in place since 2000 with an experienced team of surgeons, medical internists, anesthetists, nurses, dieticians and social workers. The program builds on the commitment by patients to maintain their reduced weight following surgery.

Bariatric surgery – such as gastric bypass surgery – involves various methods of reconfiguring a patient's digestive system that results in a significant loss of weight. It is considered a medical intervention of last resort for patients who have unsuccessfully tried to lose weight in other ways, such as diet, increased physical activity, behaviour modification and anti-obesity drugs.

This is just the latest example of how the McGuinty government is working to help Ontarians stay healthy and improve access to quality hospital care. Other examples include:

- Launching, in June 2006, a $10 million Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) Action Plan designed to encourage all Ontarians especially youth to live a healthy, active lifestyle.
- Increasing operational funding to hospitals to $12.9 billion in 2006-07, growing to $14 billion in 2008/09
- Investing more than $330 million in Ontario's Wait Time Strategy this year to provide over 275,000

additional procedures for five key health care services (hip and knee joint replacement, cataract surgeries, MRI exams, cancer surgeries and cardiac procedures).

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities - keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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